

## Sheila Houghton

18 March 1928 – 16 September 2014

Sheila Houghton, who has died at the age of 86, was a highly active and much valued member of the FNCV. Sheila was born at home in Herne Bay, Kent. She had a passion for words, literature and grammar and trained as a librarian at London University. In 1953, she met Neville Houghton, an Australian, in the staff room at Islington Central Library in London, and they were married in September the following year. They moved to Perth in 1958, and later to Melbourne.

In Australia, Sheila developed a love for the nature of her adopted country, particularly its botany and fungi. She completed a short plant identification course run by the CAE at Melbourne University, and Jon Martindale, a work colleague at Oakleigh Library, suggested she join the FNCV. She was elected a member of the Club in July 1972. Jon had joined shortly before, and soon after became the Club's librarian.

Sheila's close involvement with the Club began in the early 1980s. In August 1981, she was asked to fill a vacancy on the FNCV Council. She agreed, and thus began a long and productive association with the Club that extended almost 30 years. With the exception of the year 1990–1991, during which she and Neville worked in China, Sheila was an office bearer of the Club in every year over that period.

Once on Council, Sheila realised the Club effectively had no secretary — so she volunteered her services and filled that rôle until the 1982 AGM. She was then elected Secretary and served until January 1985. Sheila became the Honorary Librarian in 1985 and worked in that capacity until April 2011. She was also elected as a Vice-President in 1985, and in January 1986 reluctantly became Acting President (until the following AGM), when Brian Smith unexpectedly stepped down as President. Sheila was Vice-President again in 1988–1990.

In the lead up to the Club moving to its new premises in Blackburn in 1996, Sheila was a member of the Property Sub-committee that was formed; other members included the President and Secretary. Sheila was a driving force in the refitting of the building, laying out the design and ensuring that the spaces allocated for different aspects of the Club's activities were adequate, and that all work complied with government and local regulations.

Sheila was made an Honorary Life Member of the FNCV in December 1996, in recognition of her long and significant service to the Club. This did not lead to her resting on her laurels: she had been Secretary to the ANHM Committee since 1987 and, except for the break in 1991, continued in that position until 1999. She later wrote that it was one of the most enjoyable and interesting jobs she took on for the Club. In 1999 she added to her workload by being officially confirmed as FNCV Archivist.

While mediating the business of the Club through these various positions, Sheila was also engaging in field excursions, attending meetings, exhibiting specimens, and writing. From 1985 to 2009 she published six Naturalists Notes in *The Victorian Naturalist*, and numerous pieces on a range of topics in *Field Nats News*. Through her work in ordering the Club's Archives, Sheila had a detailed knowledge and appreciation of FNCV history. In 1987 she wrote a short history of the ANHM, using *The Victorian Naturalist*, Council minutes and letters as sources. Through unfortunate circumstances, all the ANHM records had been destroyed so Sheila felt that something should be done to try to retrieve as much of the history as possible. Her love of history also prompted her to write *Leaves from our history*, which was part of the celebration of the Club's 125th anniversary.

Sheila's devotion to the FNCV was coupled with her desire to make the information held



in the Club's archives accessible to the widest audience. To this end she compiled the *Index to Southern Science Record* (2002); and *Index to the Field Nats News 1991 - 2009* (2010).

Sheila's contribution to the FNCV is unparalleled in recent decades and she will be greatly missed by the many friends and acquaintances she had within the membership, and on whom she was an influence. A small measure of the respect and appreciation the Club had for Sheila was expressed at the 2010 FNCV Christmas party when the space she occupied for so many years was named The Sheila Houghton Library

and Archive. Sheila's presence and influence will live on within the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria.

I am pleased to thank Sheila's husband Neville and their children Alison Viney and Chris Houghton for their assistance in writing this tribute.



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